Interview with Robert McCloskey

The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project

AMBASSADOR ROBERT MCCLOSKEY

Interviewed by: Charles S. Kennedy

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Q: Mr. Ambassador, could you give me an idea of how you got involved in the newspaper business?

MCCLOSKEY: I began with a weekly newspaper in New Jersey, while I was going through undergraduate school in the early '50s.

Q: Where were you going to undergraduate school?

MCCLOSKEY: Temple University in Philadelphia. I had grown up in the city, spent a lot of time leaving it, but then went back to it, to go to school. After graduation, I went looking for a newspaper job in several cities, and ended up in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, where I worked for the Bethlehem Globe Times, and was a stringer for the Associated Press. After having done all of the beats, I was looking for a larger world. I wanted to go to Europe as a correspondent and was steered toward the Foreign Service.

Q: How did you get steered in that odd direction?

MCCLOSKEY: A member in Congress, who I used to cover up there in Easton, Pennsylvania, and who I was chatting with about how nice it would be to be an American

correspondent in Europe, said, “Why don't you think about the Foreign Service?” Then that was the start of something that lasted about 26 years. Then I got back to newspapering when I retired from the Foreign Service in 1981, by going to the Washington Post as the news critic of the paper. But I was never very far away from the newspaper business, or as news took on that awful word “media,” because for something like ten or eleven years, I served as the spokesman for the Department of State. So I have some understanding of both sides of the street.

Q: What was your first assignment in the Foreign Service?

MCCLOSKEY: To the American consulate general in Hong Kong, as an investigator in the old refugee relief program in 1955.

Q: With Lorrie Lawrence and company?

MCCLOSKEY: Lawrence and others, yes. By a funny turn of events have been associated now for the last four and a half years with an agency that used to be exclusively a refugee agency, a private American agency, Catholic Relief Services. So I have a way of returning to earlier concepts and pursuits.

Q: While you were in Hong Kong, I wonder if you could just explain a little of what you all were doing — I speak as a former consular officer myself — of consular work that was unique, that Hong Kong operation?

MCCLOSKEY: Yes, in 1953 the Congress passed some new refugee legislation that set quotas around the world for a period of three years. The total ran into several hundred thousand. In Western Europe, the quotas were broken up among individual countries. That's where the larger numbers were. There was one quota, however, to embrace all of the Far East, and Hong Kong had its share. It was on the order of fifteen hundred to two thousand, I believe, who were eligible for admission through the refugee relief program as part of the Hong Kong quota. These were mainly Chinese refugees from the mainland,

who had made their way into Hong Kong beginning in late 1949 when the communists took over. The refugee program began in 1953. The special refugee program ran until the end of 1956. Other than Chinese nationals, there were a few more of the more exotic people of the world, white Russians, and others of European origin who had made their way into and lived in mainland China up until 1949 or the early '50s.

We processed the applications for visas. The regulations were that the individual or the family had to demonstrate that there was a sponsor in the United States who would look after the person or the family. I believe there had to be a certificate from the Labor Department that showed there would be work available to the individual or the family leader, mother or father.

Q: What was your impression of government operations of that sort and at that level?

MCCLOSKEY: I had the sense that the quotas were not very well balanced around the world on that particular program. It got me to wondering for the first time, I suppose, how much politics played in humanitarian issues. Surely, there were greater populations who were made refugees as a result of World War II in Europe than there were in the Far East, particularly with regard to China from 1949 on.

I had the sense, and this is hindsight, understand, that if this is the way government is run, it's damn near as chaotic, at times, as putting a newspaper together. That specific program brought in a lot of people, who stayed for only the life of that program, and then left government. But it worked, however untidy it was at times, and again from that vantage point, that part of the world could have used many more numbers than were allotted to it.

Q: I say this because I started out in 1955 as a refugee relief officer, and in Europe a significant proportion were given to refugees who, of all places, were in Italy, which was not a refugee place, and to The Netherlands, mainly because of Congressional pressures

from people who had relatives there. How did you end up in the press business, starting off in this other field?

MCCLOSKEY: I had a desire to stay longer in Hong Kong. I arrived there in 1955, and this program expired with the legislation at the end of 1956. I had undertaken to learn Chinese. I was quite satisfied and, in fact, sought to stay on there as a USIA officer. That did not work, not because the people there didn't want it, but the people in Washington couldn't agree on it.

I came back, and was assigned to the UNESCO relations staff, which made me seriously consider leaving and getting back into the newspaper business. But I stuck it out for about a year, when I was asked whether I would be interested in joining the staff of the office of news in the Department, and said, “Yes, I would.” And that's the beginning of a long association with the news operations of the State Department.

Q: This would be about '57?

MCCLOSKEY: This was '58.

Q: What type of work were you doing, initially, in the department news, and where did the office of news fit within the departmental framework?

MCCLOSKEY: It was a component of the Bureau of Public Affairs. That having been established, I believe, in the early '50s when Archibald MacLeish, the American poet, critic, and writer, I think, was the first Assistant Secretary. The office of news over the years, while it remained a part of the Bureau of Public Affairs, got to be the tail wagging the dog, because the person who served as the spokesman for the State Department was much more involved in the mainstream of departmental activity, day in and day out, than was the assistant secretary for public affairs, although he was the immediate senior officer.

It was like that until I proposed to then Secretary of State Rogers, in 1969, that the office of news be made an integral part of the office of the Secretary of State. That took place and remained that way until the Carter Administration, when it was deemed worth taking back and making it a component of the Bureau of Public Affairs, and I believe it is still that way today.

Q: What were you doing initially?

MCCLOSKEY: The office of news had a geographic breakdown among the staff. There were those who followed the Far East, European affairs, the rest of the geographic bureaus, in addition to the functional bureaus, the emphasis, however, being on the geographic bureaus, which was where the news was focused. Lincoln White was the director of the office of news, and the spokesman for the department at the time. I worked for him. My area of my watch was on Far Eastern affairs. The practice was, and, I guess, still is, that the department officially holds an open, on-the-record briefing everyday.

That, however, is not the end of it for reporters, as I think you know, spend their whole days at the State Department working the same hours as you and I did when we were there. Space is provided for them. They leave their homes in the morning and go to the State Department. They don't leave their homes and go to the Washington Post or to the AP office.

So that, throughout the day, those of us in the office of news were available to reporters, who were pursuing their own exclusive stories or in furtherance of something that came up at the daily on-the-record briefing. If the story needed just a little bit more background, you sat down with somebody who knew a little bit of that, which we were presumed to know. That's how it was, and I don't know how it is today. But over a period of time I moved up the line, became deputy director, and then director of the office and spokesman for the department in 1964.

Q: Can you give, from this point of view, a difference of how you viewed the Eisenhower and then the Kennedy Administrations? How they handled the news and attitude?

MCCLOSKEY: The Eisenhower Administration, for that part of it during which I was in Washington, had, by comparison, a bit more of a relaxed attitude toward the press than subsequent administrations have had, beginning with Kennedy in 1961. However, I don't believe that there has been a White House press secretary since Jim Hagerty, Eisenhower's press secretary, who was as dominant a figure throughout the executive branch of government, where press relations are concerned. Jim, as you know, had the President's total confidence. You remember the remark when Eisenhower was taken to the hospital about “Let Jim handle it.”

Q: This was with his very serious, possibly fatal, heart attack.

MCCLOSKEY: Which was a mark of his confidence in Hagerty, but also a mark of how important Hagerty was. When it came to the public affairs and press relations of all of the branches in the executive, Jim was never, to my knowledge, exceeded in terms of authority and just calling the shots. With all that, however, the departments manage their own relations up to a certain point. The White House was a bit more laid back, but so was the world then, in the '50s. The agenda for the news media was nowhere near as varied as it is today, nor, indeed, was the foreign policy agenda anywhere near as varied as it is today. The press corps grew in size beginning with the Kennedy Administration. Television became much more of an important medium. There was the beginnings of what we now have as a considerably greater managing of events to capture the television flock, and their schedule of programs. Within the news media itself, life is a lot more competitive than it ever was. I don't think it will ever go back to that easier time. That probably ended with the Eisenhower Administration. Keep in mind that there were momentous events that changed the relationship between the press and the government, the most important of which was the Vietnam War.

Q: Also, the U2 was probably an important event.

MCCLOSKEY: That laid a scar on the State Department, and indeed was outrageous.

Q: Were you involved in that?

MCCLOSKEY: I was not involved. I was there, and it was my predecessor who carried the can.

Q: Who was that?

MCCLOSKEY: Linc White, he was out there and, in effect, presenting a lie that he had not been told otherwise about. You're perfectly right, that was a very early incident that had a serious effect on the credibility of the government.

Q: How did it affect you and the bureau? You must have all felt this, didn't you?

MCCLOSKEY: Sure, we were shell shocked. And how long did it last? It didn't last more than a few days, when Khrushchev produced the plane and the pilot. The deed was done, and the credibility of the government, I think, probably, has never been the same since. I think the mistrust of government by the press that covers it in Washington is exaggerated. I think public confidence in government is probably not exaggerated. I think there is not a hell of a lot of confidence around the country in government. But that opens so many other considerations, that may or may not have to do with foreign policy.

Q: How would you evaluate Lincoln White as a spokesman? He was there for quite a few years, wasn't he?

MCCLOSKEY: He was indeed. Linc was an old war horse. He had been there as a civil servant for quite a long time. He worked with Mike McDermott, who was the first official spokesman that the department ever employed. That began, I believe, in the forties. Linc, however, succeeded a man named Henry Sudan, who was a political appointee, and

came, I believe, from Life Magazine. He came out of journalism. Then Linc White took over, I'm going to say, in the mid '50s. I can't be very far off. But that is in the rough period of it. Then he stayed with it until the early '60s, when he went off as consul general to one of the posts in Australia, and then retired after that.

He was an honest man. He had no agenda of his own, other than what was the State Department's. That can be a searing job. That is to say that you can be at it for 24 hours a day, regularly. The news media wants your telephone number. You're talking about an international news media, so there is always something going on somewhere in the world. A lot of people think the State Department ought to have something to say about everything.

Q: You became the spokesman in what?

MCCLOSKEY: In 1964.

Q: As being underneath White before that, how did you view the Kennedy Administration coming in and the way they were handling the news? Here was a very aggressive group of very young people, who had very firm ideas.

MCCLOSKEY: You have to start with the difference between Kennedy as President, and Eisenhower, as President, on the subject of foreign policy. Kennedy made it pretty clear that he wanted to be the Secretary of State, as well as the President of the United States. That, inevitably, involved the White House on a daily basis, a hell of a lot more into foreign policy questions, as they were in the news of the time, than was the case in the Eisenhower Administration.

I spoke a while ago about Hagerty. Jim would never get involved in the answering of daily questions from the news media on foreign policy issues. It was only the larger, more cosmic issues that the White House would address. But Kennedy wanted to, and was comfortable dealing with foreign policy issues. He wanted the White House to be seen

as the center of gravity on policy making. Therefore, all important questions should be addressed there.

This had a bearing on where the State Department stood in the scheme of things. That trend has pretty much continued into more recent administrations. If you look at the first Nixon Administration, the State Department was occupying the rear of the White House on any number of important foreign policy questions. The news media in this town, many of these people are on these assignments for a decade or longer. They have a keen sense of where the blue chips are, and who is moving the blue chips in foreign policy. It wasn't long before Henry Kissinger came as the national security advisor, that the press sensed that big things were happening at the White House on foreign policy, and not so much at the State Department. To some extent, that was more apparent than real, but there was enough reality there for it to have real meaning.

Q: How did Rusk use you? Did you attend his meetings?

MCCLOSKEY: Yes, I dealt with him directly, not through the assistant secretary for public affairs. He and I have remained very close friends. Coincidentally, I was doing the same thing with him that you are doing with me ten days ago in Georgia. I am now editor of a new quarterly devoted to international affairs, that I hope to launch before the end of this year, and I wanted a contribution from Dean Rusk, so I saw him recently. Yes, I traveled for the better part of five years with Rusk, and have unlimited respect and admiration for the man, so I am a very biased witness where he is concerned.

Q: How did he view your operations?

MCCLOSKEY: With increasing importance, as we went along. When Dean Rusk became Secretary of State, like others, he wished that the press would go away. It didn't, and it shouldn't, and it's a nuisance. I would say that he was uncomfortable for the first few years of his first term. But for all of the last term, and as much as, maybe, the second half of his first term, he got to know them. He gained an appreciation for what the institution was and

what its responsibilities were. He disagreed with them as I did and do often times. But as time went on he did his level best to meet with them, hold press conferences, and be seen as the articulator of policy and most especially during the Johnson Administration.

Q: How did you and the Secretary of State view the press? Did you see this divided up into what you would call responsible people, and people who are out to make the day's headlines?

MCCLOSKEY: Certainly, not equally divided, but there is an element of just those people who have less interest in the mainstream of foreign policy, and where the U.S. is in it, and what the U.S. is thinking and doing, than getting on to an exclusive, sometimes overly hyperventilated story, that is, at best, only on the margins of the main business of foreign policy of the government.

They are out-numbered by more serious people, who I have often said would be, put it this way, for whom foreign policy is, at least, an avocation, if it weren't an assignment. Some of them are very, very smart. They have been at it long enough to sometimes perfectly anticipate what the government will do in a given situation. They can tell you when the government is going to make a protest. They can anticipate when an ambassador may be called in by the Secretary of State for one thing, and another. Most importantly, they have gotten their sources all over this town, and foreign policy, if it ever was made only at the State Department, it hasn't been that way for at least a generation, I can tell you.

Q: Did you find yourself using the press? In other words, rather than just being an instrument, were you using what the press was saying and feeding it back to the State Department to say, look, something is going on elsewhere?

MCCLOSKEY: Absolutely, and you wouldn't be worth your salt, if you didn't. And you wouldn't be worth your salt, either, if you didn't try to use the press, again, not in the pejorative, mischievous sense of use. American foreign policy will be successful or not, I'll overstate to make a point, depending on the amount of public support it has. It can

only obtain public support if it is communicated to the public, and the only way that it gets communicated is through the news media.

So government has got to meet the press, not only on the press's terms, but it has an obligation to meet the press, to answer its questions as best it can, which doesn't mean that it has to answer every question that every reporter thinks to ask. And realize that there will be days when it impossible to answer that specific question. But the day may come when you can answer it. And to avoid, to the maximum extent, the corrosion of the relationship between press and government because it is a tough one to begin with.

It's an adversary relationship, by its very nature. That cannot and should not change, but there are ways to reduce the sometimes rancid atmosphere that gets in between the press and government and the hostility and mistrust that's there. That has its ups and downs. And as often as not I have to say it is the fault of the government.

Q: How did the Foreign Service, the officers on the desk and all, respond to the press? Did you have to get them to treat these people as other than the enemy? Was this part of your problem?

MCCLOSKEY: Indeed, it was.

Q: Can you give some examples?

MCCLOSKEY: The traditional attitude of the Foreign Service was to tell them as little as possible. This business we're dealing with is very complex, very delicate, highly nuanced, and deserving only of discussion among we and our peers. And they out there in that rambunctious, rowdy fourth estate, they're really not our peers, which has a large quotient of baloney to it.

I spent more time than I ever wished trying to have the Foreign Service people, who were at the given time on assignment in the department, to understand that our own interest

can be served if you are willing to sit and meet with these people. Maybe there ought to be something in your job description which would say this. Resisting is not going to advance our own cause, because what they can't get from you, they will get from somewhere, because while foreign policy may not be made all over this town, it sure as hell is talked about all over this town.In recent years information just got spread all over, all over the Congress, throughout many agencies of the Executive branch. And that time when the State Department was the preeminent steward of foreign policy, that's long gone. It will never return, and it may have been a heady time, and have been enjoyed, but it just isn't. Take an American embassy abroad, how many different agencies of the U.S. government do you have representation? I have had three embassies and the number of agencies from Washington that are represented sometimes dims the number of Foreign Service people and professional diplomats on your staff.

Q: Yes.

MCCLOSKEY: I like to believe and I know there is evidence for it that by gnawing away at this with career people, the press did have greater access throughout the department for that kind of discussion that we all have called background, where the desk officer, the office director, the deputy assistant secretary, and others would give a man five or ten minutes to set some kind of context for him on some breaking development that made a story either out of Washington, or from somewhere else in the world.

I have been away from it now for quite a long time and I am not quite sure what the situation would be today. But I had the same experience when I later became assistant secretary for congressional relations, where, perhaps to put it badly, you had a staff that was made up of a fair number of hacks who had come off the hill. When I left there we had Foreign Service officers in virtually everyone of the slots.

Q: This was when?

MCCLOSKEY: This was the period 1974 to 1976. The Foreign Service, not to a man, but institutionally, had the same attitude toward the Congress that it had toward the press.

Q: Yes.

MCCLOSKEY: I know that, at least, while I was there that it was not quite as insular, as it had been, but I don't know what it is like today.

Q: Johnson had a reputation for just hating to be scooped, and the word would get out that so- and-so would be an ambassador, and that appointment was killed just because the word got out before Johnson announced it. How did you deal with this almost paranoia?

MCCLOSKEY: I have an anecdote that will fit your question. In 1968 there were negotiations underway for several months in Washington to renew the U.S.-Soviet cultural exchange agreement. There were Soviet officials from Moscow who had been sent into Washington. The negotiations had been underway for a matter of weeks. So the press was fully aware of it, and from time to time we would at the press briefing give the reporters an update on where matters were. And as another example of the way these people keep their little futures book, something to check into five days from now. They would remind me, where are we today. Are we going to get a new agreement? Well, it came the day when the negotiations had been completed, and the agreement was to be signed with an official luncheon at the Soviet embassy. A glitch developed at mid morning over some language that had to do with the way the that the words assistant secretary of state translated into Russian. So that was to be clarified and settled, and there may have been another marginal detail at the luncheon.

Someone who was going from the department with the Secretary of State to the luncheon promised he would call me when the thing had been resolved. Then we could tell the press we now have a new agreement as of today. So I waited on the call and it didn't come until

the luncheon had been completed at the embassy. And when I had the word, I then told the press we have a new agreement, and they'll be signing the documents.

That evening at home, I answered the phone. Bill Moyers was calling from the White House, and he said he had someone that wanted to talk to me. And with that, the President of the United States, Lyndon Johnson, got on the phone, and for the next fifteen minutes, I was simply unable to speak, because he just never stopped. I may have exaggerated fifteen minutes, but it was probably twelve. What he objected to was that the Soviets had just a couple of months before that refused visas to a company performing “Hello Dolly.”

Q: “Hello Dolly” being the musical?

MCCLOSKEY: A musical which was to be the last in the performing arts component of the agreement, and he had been doing a burn over that ever since. Of course, what he wanted to know from me was, “Who told you that we have a new agreement with the Soviet Union? We don't have any agreement with the Soviet Union unless I, the President of the United States, tell you so. Now who told you?” And he kept demanding that I tell him who telephoned me from the Soviet Embassy. I simply reminded him that, when I did get a chance to say anything, that the Secretary of State had gone to the luncheon, which consummated the negotiation.

You are perfectly right. Lyndon Johnson, who by his own admission- (end of tape)

He said sometimes I talk too much and other times I talk too little. He was a bear where the press was concerned, and he just couldn't abide being scooped, as you put it. He, of course, wanted to avoid the bad news, and that's when he would go into a funk. But when he thought he had good news, you recall, he would take reporters and walk them around the rose garden until they were bowlegged, sometimes reading to them from classified

telegrams. He was a difficult man where press relations and questions were involved. He was a man of considerable ego, as you know.

The day of the Kennedy funeral, many heads of government from around the world came to attend it. That evening, in what was one of the first affairs of state for the new President, Lyndon Johnson, within a matter of 72 hours, was to receive these people. It was agreed that he would do this at the State Department, and a reception was laid on. But for 18 hours, we could not give the networks an answer as to whether they could have live cameras at the reception, because we couldn't get an answer out of LBJ. Finally, late in the day, George Reedy, who was acting press secretary at the time, telephoned me and said the President has agreed, but there is a stipulation — that the cameras are going to have to be set up in one specific place, so that they cover his profile only from the left side of his face. That was Lyndon Baines Johnson. That's not all there is to say about a man who had many other great attributes, but we're talking only about his attitude toward and relations with the press.

Q: How did you view and treat the Vietnam War? You were there from the beginning until we got our troops out.

MCCLOSKEY: That was probably the toughest continuous assignment I guess I've ever had. As I said earlier, there is always something going on around the world that can get your telephone to ringing at home. As this part of the world was going to bed, things were just beginning to happen out in that part of the world.

The coverage of the war was heavy, detailed, saturating at both ends in Washington and Saigon. It was perfectly obvious to anyone with two eyes in his head and two ears that the U.S. government was heading into serious credibility problems. That is a very complex matter, that simply can't be summed up in a very short time. I will say, however, that there was at the same time a very important term, benchmark, if you like, in the history

of American journalism, because we began to get what was then being called advocacy journalism.

This is the phenomenon where the reporters covering the war became involved in the story, and became part of the story. There used to be an iron law in journalism, if you permit yourself to become a part of the story you're not serving your responsibility as a reporter. It is still considered an iron law, but it obviously has been breached. I think that breaching began during the Vietnam War.

You remember the call that Kennedy grew so agitated about David Halberstam and his coverage out of Saigon in those days, that Kennedy made the serious mistake of going to the New York Times and asking that Halberstam be reassigned, which was a blunder of the first order in the conduct of government/press relations. But it will give you some sense — it always reminds me, of how passions were developing over that bloody war, when there were sins of commission, omission, committed by both the government and the news media throughout.

Q: Did you feel that you were being manipulated yourself within the department?

MCCLOSKEY: I can only answer that by citing another anecdote, illustration. Manipulated, I wouldn't go so far, having information withheld, yes. It became evident to me in May of 1965 when we added a very significant number of Marines to our forces in Vietnam. This was the beginning of the use of the word escalation, the deepening of American involvement. It became clear that the Marines were going to be involved much more than just perimeter security, which, I believe, is the way their assignment was being defined by the White House and by the Pentagon.

When you look back at how absurd some of this was, when the administration thought it could conceal this: the fact that the Marines were, in fact, going to be involved in search

and destroy operations. With the size of the press corps covering the war in Vietnam, it stuns the imagination to think that this could have been kept very long.

Well, it did by euphemisms and some misleading statements by different sources here in Washington, official and unofficial. My instinct told me, don't touch it. So for a long time, that is to say days, whenever I was asked whether the role or assignment of the Marines in Vietnam had been changed, that is to say, upgraded, I found some way to have no comment.

However, it got to a point where this was no longer tolerable. By which time, I knew, the Marines were, in fact, in combat. I answered a question one day, and I forget whether it was June 5th or sometime in June of 1965, that confirmed this, and led among other things, the New York Times the following day, saying in an editorial that the American people were told by a minor official of the State Department, yesterday, that the country is at war in Vietnam.

To go back to your question about manipulated, I don't want to say that I was manipulated, because if I had known I was being manipulated, I would not have stayed on. I knew that information was being withheld, and I would give anyone the benefit of a doubt for a period. But that doubt became an unreasonable thing after I knew better, had hard information which really was only confirming what reporters out there were telling their home offices back here, but couldn't get official confirmation. We had put ourselves in a box, that was just so untenable.

Q: You mentioned euphemisms. So often words get used like a protective reaction, or this type of thing, rather than saying we're fighting. Did you ever sit down with people and say what kind of words will we use to deal with this which make it sound a little bit better than the straightforward way?

MCCLOSKEY: It happened, but let me say, there is no institution in our lives that isn't seeking always to put its best foot forward, and even the best face possible on something.

It is an American custom, in hindsight, can always be made to look totally absurd. I grant that.

Q: Well, moving on, when the Nixon Administration came in, from your perspective, was this the equivalent to a hostile takeover, as I am told it was, when the Reagan Administration took over from the Carter Administration?

MCCLOSKEY: Do you mean in the State Department?

Q: Yes, in the State Department, and particularly in the news area.

MCCLOSKEY: Oh no, I'll speak from my own experience. I'll speak for myself. I wanted, by this time, to get back overseas. I had been here getting on to eleven years. My family was prepared for it, and Rusk asked me to stay where I am until the new Secretary of State comes on. This really ought to be his call. As it turns out, that is exactly what happened, and he asked me to stay on.

So the senior level, if you like of the news operation didn't change with the Nixon Administration, and indeed, Nixon asked to see me very early on. He and I had never met before, but he asked to see me, because he was bringing new people into his office, into the White House press secretary's office. He had Herb Kline with him, of course, but whether Kline didn't want to be press secretary, or it was never in the cards, I'm not sure. Herb became what is known, still I think, as communications director for the White House, a little more behind the scenes than the White House press secretary.

In the department, the assistant secretary for public affairs changed, but then so did most others, perhaps all of the assistant secretaries. Michael Collins was brought in first, I believe, as the assistant secretary for public affairs. By this time, I had persuaded Secretary of State Rogers to take the office of news out of the Bureau of Public Affairs, and put it in with his office. I said, “That may be an incentive for me staying longer. But I

want you to know," I told him very clearly, "that I want to turn this over to someone else in time. I am entitled now to leave and go overseas and stay on for a while."

Q: Was Rogers different than Rusk in how he used his spokesman?

MCCLOSKEY: He wasn't different in how he used the spokesman, so much as he was different, himself, in the way he met with the press. He didn't have very many press conferences. He was never very comfortable with the press collectively. I am certain that he was uncomfortable, also, because the perception grew and then the reality was there that he was being upstaged in many cases by Henry Kissinger as the NSC guy in the White House.

I mean, read Henry's book on this. He was for the first year, at least, maybe even longer, an anonymous source, so long as anyone is ever anonymous in this town. That is to say he never held on-the-record press conferences. But then he did, I can remember the occasion, but I may have the year wrong, but by probably 1972 he was holding press conferences on the record.Bill Rogers, who deserved much better and didn't get it, didn't hold all that many press conferences. However, one thing he did that was different from Dean Rusk, was to take reporters on these overseas trips. We had not done that before. We would give a reporter a ride if we were going from one capital to another, and the reporter was assigned to cover Rusk's itinerary and otherwise couldn't make a commercial connection. If he asked me, we would generally take him aboard the plane. With Roger's tenure, that began the setting aside of 15 or however many seats they do, today, for carrying reporters with us. He was reasonably comfortable with that arrangement, but holding press conferences in Washington, he found a bit more intimidating and therefore, didn't hold very many of them.

Q: Did you find yourself getting caught between Rogers and Kissinger at all?

MCCLOSKEY: Oh, that happened, and the fact that I retained good relationships with the two of them, I guess, says something. Because I finally did get to go overseas, became

ambassador to Cyprus, and was only there less than a year when Kissinger became Secretary of State and got me back right away. He wanted me to do the same job, and I refused.

Q: I'm told, I can't remember who, maybe it was Andy Steigman, said that you were one of the few people who could tell Henry Kissinger what you felt about things and kid him to his face, which he would take from you but not from many other people. Did you find that your job as spokesman was being undercut by the National Security Council press conferences? Were you going off in different directions?

MCCLOSKEY: Not so much in different directions. It was, more often than not, them stealing the issue and handling the news of it. I will admit there was, perhaps, an element of selfishness in it; however, I wanted the State Department to be seen as much as the center of gravity as possible, and to keep the press covering the State Department and not covering the White House, where very often they kind of get half-asked answers on subjects.

Q: Probably not well-staffed-out for one thing?

MCCLOSKEY: In addition to which, the reporters who cover the White House are, in my prejudicial view, a cut below those who cover the State Department.

Q: One has that impression.

MCCLOSKEY: Again, I don't know what they're like today. But you couldn't — when John Hightower and Sue Hensly, the AP and UPI fellows in those years, the head of Reuters and ____ Press, and then all of the special newspapers, American and foreign. These were fellows who read books, if not wrote books, on issues in the foreign policy arena, who knew their stuff. They could put a paragraph in their stories, quite on their own about what happened at the last NATO meeting that had some bearing on what was said today

in Washington. That's not the level of correspondent who traditionally covers the White House. So I had a selfish interest for those reasons.

Q: How did your assignment to Cyprus, of all places, come about? You've been under the grill, and I can't think of a worse place to go.

MCCLOSKEY: I was not as satisfied as I wanted to be, and felt I was entitled to, with the assignment, but I took it gladly. I was determined to get out for awhile, and I got interested in the problem. Because first of all, two men who were long gone, called me and invited me to come and see them, George Ball, who had done a Cyprus tour in 1967 when he tried to mediate, and Cy Vance, whom I had known from earlier days when he was at the Pentagon.

I suddenly got very much interested in the issue; however, my instructions were, on leaving: don't take the U.S. into the center of this Greek-Turkish thing again. You want, simply, for now, to be encouraging the two sides to continue their so-called inter-communal talks. But as it turned out, I wasn't there all that long, but I will admit that I was not as satisfied as I hoped to be when I first went off.

Q: What was the situation during the time you were there in Cyprus? It's a complicated situation.

MCCLOSKEY: I think that the essential problem was that neither Makarios. ...

Q: By the way, you went there around May of 1973, I think.

MCCLOSKEY: Yes, you're right, in May.

Q: Well, you were confirmed in May.

MCCLOSKEY: The problem was with the leadership. The interlocutors, that is to say, clerides on the Greek side, and Rauf Denblast on the Turkish side, knew what was

necessary to make an agreement. They both grew up on the island. They both went separately to school in London, came back and found themselves the spokesmen for their two parties. The problem was that on the Turkish side, Ankara had very little interest in a settlement at the time, and was not prepared to do what would have been required to make a deal. Therefore, Denblast never had the confidence that he would be backed up by Ankara. In turn, Clerides suffered the same problem with Makarios who was still president of the republic. So the makings, the components, of what would have been, I think, a sound agreement could be identified, but could not be brought together because they would not have been supported by the higher authorities.

Q: Why did both Ankara and Makarios want to keep this thing going?

MCCLOSKEY: Makarios always fancied himself a player on a larger stage than just Cyprus. He was, as you know, a charter member of the Enosis movement of the '50s. Cyprus was an international issue as long as there was tension. In the case of Ankara, I think it was the concessions that would have been required to make the deal. That's all it really could have been because I never felt that Cyprus, for most of the Turkish population, isn't as important an issue as it is for most of the Greek population. So concessions were the one thing in one capital and another thing in the other.

Q: What sort of signals were you getting from our embassy in Athens? Henry Tasca was the ambassador at that point. As far as what we might be doing and all, were you working in different directions, do you feel?

MCCLOSKEY: No, I don't think in different directions. I don't know how much of this you want to get into.

Q: I wouldn't mind getting into it. It is an important issue.

MCCLOSKEY: Well, Grivas, the Eoka leader was still on the island in those days. I one time asked Makarios, “What is it that Grivas wants, in addition, to Enosis, Enosis being

the union of the island with Greece?" Makarios said, "He wants to kill me." Realizing that Grivas was a creature of the junta in Athens.

Q: This is the colonels and all.

MCCLOSKEY: Colonels, this obviously raised in my mind that Makarios better be careful, because to the extent he resists Grivas, he is resisting the Junta. And they've got all the cards in Athens. Sure enough, it wasn't the issue of Grivas that finally undid Makarios when he was overthrown. It was a different issue, but it was still the Junta who overthrew him.

Were Tasca and I working in concert? I can't say that we were. I never had all that much communication with Henry Tasca. I think there is enough of the history written since then that shows that it was as much the CIA in Athens who was speaking for the U.S. with the Junta principle, Ioannidis, particularly, that Tasca might have taken himself out of some of it. Indeed, when the crisis came, and Kissinger sent Sisco to both Ankara and Athens to try to get a cease fire on the island, he met with. ...

Q: This was July 15, 1974, thereafter.

MCCLOSKEY: Sisco succeeded in meeting with Ecevit in Ankara, but then when he got to Athens, he couldn't find anyone to meet with. I don't think he ever got to see Ioannidis, and Ioannidis was the guy with the power, with the authority. So the Athens scene was one that I never had any direct experience with, because by the time I got to Athens some years later, the democratic government had been in.

Q: I have to say here, I spent four years as consul general in Athens with Henry Tasca from 1970 to '74. I sat in the country team. I was not privy to all the policies, but the role of the CIA was disturbing to many of us there. I would raise issues of what would amount to issues of human rights, which were coming to me from the public who came in, and this would be discounted by the CIA who were working with the Greek CIA. It was a very

uncomfortable situation, I have to say. Well, we will be coming back to Greece. But you left there in January, 1974, wasn't it?

MCCLOSKEY: Yes, it was a crazy period. I heard on the Voice of America one evening, as we were having dinner that Henry Kissinger had been named Secretary of State, and that Bill Rogers had resigned. The next day I got one of those messages, would I come back for consultation to San Clemente?

Q: This was Nixon's summer home.

MCCLOSKEY: I was one of four or five, anyhow, who were asked to come home on very short notice. Habib, Helms. ...

Q: Philip Habib was in Korea?

MCCLOSKEY: Habib was in Korea. Helms was in Iran, Dean Brown from Jordan, myself — I'm remembering the names in part because we all went to a lousy Mexican restaurant one night at Habib's insistence. That would have been — was it August?

Q: Well, you left in January of '74.

MCCLOSKEY: Well, I'll get to that. I said, no, I would not come back to do the same job. That I wanted, however, to make the case for the appointment of a career officer, because I had already had intimations that Kissinger wanted to bring someone in from the news media. So, finally, got him to hold still, provided I gave him a name. I did, I proposed George Best. He said, “Who's George Best?” and I told him. He said, “Well, all right, but you have to come back here.” So word was sent to George. I went back to Nicosia, and promised that I would come back again for one month in September. I came back on Labor Day. George, meanwhile, had come back from, I guess, he was still in Brussels.

We got started. Let's see, Kissinger went to New York for the usual round of meetings with foreign ministers coming for the general assembly in September, a practice that Rusk

started many years ago. We were up there for something like two weeks and then came back down here, and then went back for one more week. This is now the first week in October, and that's when the war in the Middle East broke out.

Q: Yes, It is also called the October War.

MCCLOSKEY: This is a crazy arrangement. I am still on pay for the American ambassador to Cyprus, and I am announcing that war has broken out in the Middle East from the Waldorf Astoria in New York, at six o'clock in the morning, or some crazy thing. Then things went crazy, and I stayed here well into October, probably the end of October, which included going to Moscow, this was in connection with getting a cease fire in the Middle East, then to Peking, after that. So it was well on into October, by which time he had me against the wall. I said, “All right, I would come back, but I would not do the daily job any longer. We would have to find some other designation for it. I'd help in any way I could, but then he was also going to have to persuade my family.”

So we went out again to the Middle East, because this occurred in Cairo, and I had my family come from Nicosia to Cairo. He met with them, by which time it was done, and I had agreed to return completely, but that I had to go back to Cyprus. I think, I went back finally on Thanksgiving and stayed through Christmas, and came back in January of 1974, as ambassador-at-large in which I would supervise the whole press relations business. I would take on some negotiations. Then he also wanted me to take on the congressional relations job, and I said, “No, I didn't want to do that.” There was Linwood Holton in the job at that time, the former governor of Virginia. So I was appointed ambassador-at-large, with a kind of Rube Goldberg job description. However, within probably six months, maybe even less, Holton resigned, and I just thought I had better do it for the Department, if not for Henry Kissinger. Somebody had to do it.

Q: This is the congressional relations job.

MCCLOSKEY: Yes, then I did our military base negotiations with Spain at the same time. We were going to do them with Portugal and the revolution. Anyhow, I had a few meetings with Carlucci at the time. We were going to try to do the Azores and the Spanish at the same time. It never worked out that way, but I did the Spanish one.

Q: You say you found yourself going out working on a cease fire in the Middle East. Then you went to China, working again on negotiations. What were you doing in these negotiations?

MCCLOSKEY: What was I doing?

Q: Yes.

MCCLOSKEY: I was serving, in part, as the spokesman for Henry Kissinger. I was lending a hand at drafting papers that were going into the substantive meetings that we were having. I was trying to persuade George Best to stick with it. It is not this bad all the time. I was playing, to some extent, a confidant to Kissinger, who kind of relishes that way of operating. He needs people, I guess, he certainly wants them, and maybe he needs them to bounce ideas off. It was a crazy, crazy period.

Q: How effective did you find Kissinger? In these interviews I'm doing, I am getting a mixed reaction. In some cases, absolutely brilliant; however, in dealing with Iran, as being a disaster. It's a mixed bag.

MCCLOSKEY: I'd say pretty much the same thing. He could be simply dazzling at times, with the presentation of an issue, the capacity for bringing people along. I speak now about other foreign ministers. I sat in Geneva, where it was a meeting with Gromyko, and the subject was nuclear weapons. In addition to having the broad sweep and context of an issue on something like that, he had all the arithmetic at the same time. He knew the warheads. He knew the launchers. He knew the missiles. At one point, he kept correcting

Gromyko, who could never get it right, who when he wasn't being corrected by Kissinger, was being corrected by Dobrynin, who was sitting with him.

So you could have Henry Kissinger shape an outcome by the force of his intellect and ability to articulate. There were other times when he was just all thumbs. One example, if he wasn't all thumbs, he could be simply defiant. I go back to Cyprus, this is '74 and Makarios has been overthrown and the Turks have landed. I told him straight up that if the Junta goes through and names someone named Nicos Sampson to become the President, I said there is going to be trouble. Why? Because, I used the very word, he is a thug. And the Turks have experience with him, and they will not let this stand. By this time, this is a year later, this is July of 1984. George Best had given up. I, still trying to preserve the position, I got Bob Anderson to come back from wherever he was, in Africa, in some small country.

So I was agitating all one morning to have Anderson go to the briefing and say that — if necessary wait for the question: Do you recognize this guy? — and say we are suspending our recognition pending clarification, or something like that. Kissinger wouldn't permit it. So I lost the argument. And I think that was the beginning of some incoherence on the handling of the Cyprus problem, which would have been better, and I don't mean to sound as though had he taken my advice.

But another incident in the first week of August, when the Turks made the second move. Remember they came in, they occupied X amount, X percentage of territory, like 25%, and then in their second move they went to 40% of the territory. And the second move was so unjustified because the shooting was over, the threat, they had their population well protected. But they made the second move with an eye toward future negotiations. They would simply control that much more territory.

So there is a meeting in his office. What are we going to do? He went around the room, and I said, “I think that we should announce that from today we will suspend any further

deliveries of U.S. military equipment to Turkey." Well, he exploded. I contend that that was the beginning of the administration losing control of policy, because it was followed by the congressionally imposed embargo on Turkey. And for how long, two years, we could not get that bloody thing lifted. We spent so much time, I was running congressional relations at the time. We had Ford meet. We had Kissinger meet. We had all kinds of things. We had breakfasts. We had lunches, and we had, who knows, what else.

Q: This is the discovery, that there is such a thing as a Greek lobby.

MCCLOSKEY: Well, Yes. It doesn't answer the question though, was there one before that, but we sure as hell know there was one after it. Well, you're right.

Q: I wonder, do you think we might move to The Netherlands now? Because there are many other things I would like to explore, and I hope there will be other interviews which will be more job specific. The Netherlands sounds like a much more pleasant assignment. If there is such a thing as a reward, this sounds like it. How did this come about?

MCCLOSKEY: Well, like so many of these things, there is a certain element of roulette. You start out with one. First, I was going to go to Israel. Then, Kenneth Keating got into it, and that was that. But that had gone to a point where Golda Meir was here for something, and I sat next to her at a luncheon, and she said, "When are you coming to Israel?"

So then, I forget, Sweden, no, well someplace, finally I was asked would I want to go to The Hague, because I had complained loudly enough that it was time again, and I had other personal reasons. So I was asked then, would I want to go to The Hague. I said, "Yes, I'll go, and I'll be very happy." I did go off quite happy. It was my first European assignment. The Dutch, whatever else you say about them, they are into everything.

So it was educational. It was important. There were a fair number, both then and in the early part of the Carter Administration, of career people in Western Europe, unusual.

Q: I was going to ask how you were able to stay with the change of administrations in Holland?

MCCLOSKEY: Well, I just never had any question about that. I knew everybody who was going to be involved. I had known Vance very well in the past. In fact, he asked me, “Would you rather come back here or stay where you are?” I said, “I would rather stay here.” Anyhow, in Western Europe there were Janet and Dean in Copenhagen. I was in The Hague. Hartman, ultimately, got to Paris.

Q: Arthur Hartman.

MCCLOSKEY: There was some career person in Madrid.

Q: Wells Stabler was it, back then?

MCCLOSKEY: He had been there. Let's see, this was now '77, and I guess he was still there. Yes, he was still there, because my family went into Spain for vacation and stayed there. Anyhow, I can remember saying that it's unusual that there would be this number of career people in Western Europe at this time.

Q: What were the main problems that you saw that you had to deal with in The Hague?

MCCLOSKEY: The one that was the most difficult was non-proliferation. It was a son of a gun. Where there were two, non-proliferation, and the neutron bomb. Because we all spent a lot of time in Western Europe, you know we were under instruction to get yes for an answer on the deployment of these things. The Dutch, I had one hell of a time on that issue.

Then after things were just about set, Carter made this off-the-wall decision that he wasn't going to do it. It's never been adequately explained. In fact, I wrote a paper, not on this subject, but used it to help make a case on a longer paper I was writing about press leaks,

for Johns Hopkins two years ago. I looked up everything I possibly could find and talked to any number of people. Anyhow, that was one of the important issues.

Q: The Dutch seemed to have always taken something very close to a neutralist stance on many of the defense issues. They're part of NATO, but in some ways you almost feel they are NATO's neutrals.

MCCLOSKEY: It's true, and the Socialists were in power when I got there. But there are many idiosyncrasies about Dutch politics. For example, The Dutch Prime Minister, at the time, was the Socialist party leader. He pretty much saved Bernhard's skin.

Q: This is Prince Bernhard?

MCCLOSKEY: Prince Bernhard after the Lockheed scandal. It would have been easy enough for this socialist prime minister to let the Parliament dump on Bernhard, but he made a very balanced and somewhat sympathetic presentation to the Parliament, which took the edge and the curse off what Bernhard had gotten himself into. It was a coalition. They were the governing party. The coalition leader was socialist. They were dovish on defense issues. They had to pay attention to — the terms are just the opposite there, the liberal party is, in fact, the conservative party, the one that calls itself liberal. It was a significant number of influential politicians, although they just didn't have the numbers to lead the coalition.

Then you had figures like Joe Luns, who had for many years been the Foreign Minister, and was in this period the secretary general of NATO. They maintained an army, a fairly sizable one, and that liberalism which beats in the Dutch breast was venting itself as much on domestic issues, than as, I think, it was on foreign policy issues, with the exception of neutron weapons. Yet the Dutch were quite prepared to take the neutron bomb.

Q: Could you explain what the neutron bomb is, for somebody who might not be familiar, if you can explain it?

MCCLOSKEY: It is the phrase attributed to the weapon, otherwise called the enhanced radiation warhead. We were speaking of euphemisms, earlier. It's principal feature is that the explosion from the warhead will cause less damage to buildings than other nuclear warheads, but it may cause greater civilian casualties. If you can turn that into any kind of public virtue, I defy you. In any case, the odd thing about this entire story is that the ERW had been around for quite a long time, had been the subject of some news coverage and somewhat more extensive treatment in scientific or military journals that weren't making that much news, until a Washington Post reporter found some testimony where funds were being requested that year, being 1979, for the weapon. He wrote a story, repeated much of what had been written in the past and it caused an uproar, because it was the weapon that wouldn't damage buildings, but would kill people.

Q: The ideal capitalist weapon.

MCCLOSKEY: Anyhow, that is what it was. It shocked the Europeans who had not heard of it before, and certainly not seen it described as such, as it did many Americans at the same time. It was a tough one to defend, because once it was described as I've mentioned, whatever other virtue or rationale the weapon had would never catch up with that awful sloganeering.

Q: So you were, at one point, trying to defend it and then the President changed his mind?

MCCLOSKEY: It was an astonishing development for all of Western Europe, and one of the angriest people of all was Helmut Schmidt, who was chancellor of the Federal Republic at the time, went to great lengths against public opinion to assure that the weapon could be deployed there. I think he contends that he lost serious political capital as a result of Carter's decision, which I have not found any convincing or satisfactory explanation for.

Q: How about other issues, were American civilians with drugs there a problem, you as ambassador getting about?

MCCLOSKEY: Yes, when the French Connection was busted, the center of gravity on drug trade, not so much its use, moved to Amsterdam, and by the time I got to The Hague the DEA, Drug Enforcement Agency, had established a small office in the American embassy, for which the consent of the Dutch government had been obtained, had been spending time trying to convince the Dutch that there was a serious problem and that we would hope the Dutch would get behind some law enforcement measures. This is just about the time I arrived. I got involved in some of this.The man who later became Prime Minister in a subsequent conservative government was, at that time, a minister of justice, and had accepted a DEA invitation to visit the United States. I know, specifically New York, where the case was made — it didn't have to be made, it was self-evident — that there was a serious problem there, but that much of the narcotics were coming into the U.S. from abroad, and that some from Southeast Asia was making its way through Western Europe, specifically, Amsterdam.With that the Dutch then got behind it. It was a little bit passive, because the Dutch rather took the attitude that neither Dutch were involved in the trafficking nor were Dutch among the addicts. Well, within a fairly short time that changed, and Dutch were becoming much more involved and were experiencing much more serious addiction problems. By the time I left Holland, they had very much accepted responsibility for it. While it's still there, my sense is not of the magnitude it was in those years.

Q: How did you find the staff of the embassy? I always think of The Netherlands as not being in the mainstream of the major European posts, and I was wondering whether there was a tendency for the cream of the Foreign Service not to go there. How did you feel about that?

MCCLOSKEY: I 'd say that the strongest office was the political office. It happened that the counsulor was, in fact, Dutch-born, and was bilingual, of course, but had a strong sense and understanding of a very complex society. When I went there, for example, I had that

kind of narrow mind set that recalled having a Dutch uncle or a Dutch cleanser, or going Dutch, all of which suggested a pretty straitlaced, hard working, work ethic minded people. It is not that at all. It is a hell of a lot more complex. And this man quite understood all of that.

I think, probably, the economic section could have been stronger given the magnitude, well, of matters like Dutch investment in the United States, and American investment there. In that period the Dutch, as a nation, represented the heaviest outside investment in the United States. So that there was a lot to that part of the bilateral relationship, and I'm not sure that we had the strongest economic section that we should have had. The public affairs section was pretty good. The consular section hardly amounted to anything in The Hague, but there were two big consulates, one in Rotterdam, and one in Amsterdam. There we had very good representation. On the whole, I think the mission could had been stronger than it was.

Q: What about in the consulates, maybe this is after your time, but for a period, anyway, our consulate general in Amsterdam was almost in a state of siege with young leftists, particularly during the Vietnam War, but even afterwards, causing a great deal of trouble with very little protection from the city fathers of Amsterdam. Why did we keep it going?

MCCLOSKEY: Yes, one of the problems that I found there — and I'll get to your specific matter in a moment — was, as I said earlier, there was a Dutch tendency to want to get involved in everything. And the liberal heartbeat of the country, which is a sizable number of its population, adopts causes that have nothing to do with that country. For example, we often had demonstrations in front of the American embassy on their perception of the treatment of the American Indians in the United States, and the attitude in this country toward homosexuals, and I remember, particularly, the woman who was a spokesperson for orange juice, who identified with the anti-homosexuals.

Q: Yes, Anita Bryant.

MCCLOSKEY: The Dutch would demonstrate on the conditions in American prisons outside the American embassy. To go to your question on the consulates, the Vietnam matter was pretty much over when I arrived. I didn't get there until 1976. We left Vietnam, altogether, in 1975.

But what affected the consulate, and not directly, but it was on the scene at the time, were Dutch demonstrations that were going to Dutch issues for the first time. These were called the squatters, who were occupying both abandoned buildings, and incomplete new buildings. And, indeed, the day that Beatrix was invested on the throne in 1978, the most serious demonstrations and violent ones ever to occur in Amsterdam, occurred. These were not anti-American, but the consulate was right there on one of the main thoroughfares.

In Rotterdam, the biggest threat to the consulate general there, in my time, was Washington going to close it. I fought to keep it open. I was satisfied, having going there often enough, that it did a real day's work, and had a fair amount of business. Although, one had to acknowledge that Washington asked a fair question, why couldn't people go to The Hague if it was a matter of visas. Eventually, it was closed, and perhaps for good reason looked at globally.

Q: Then I would like to move to your assignment as ambassador to Greece. This was in 1978. Having touched the Cyprus issue, why you would want to indulge in masochism by going to Greece, I have a question. How did that come about?

MCCLOSKEY: I had said to a couple of people in Washington who asked me, that I was looking forward to an embassy with larger, heavier responsibilities. And Bill Schaufele, who had been assistant secretary for African affairs was nominated to go to go to Athens. At his hearing some confusion in an exchange with Senator Joe Biden developed, and the Greek press ran this up in a quite distorted fashion. The subject was the Aegean and sovereignty over islands in the Aegean.

I was unaware of all of this, sitting, minding my own business in The Hague. But it got to a point where the Secretary of State, and presumably, the President said to themselves, it would be unfair to have Bill go to Athens. There are other ways to look at this question, as I am sure you would appreciate. In any case, it was off, and I knew nothing about this until I read in the International Herald Tribune that I was going to be nominated to go to Athens.

Q: Such is the instant communications of the Department of State.

MCCLOSKEY: I think it was three days later someone telephoned me and asked me if this was something I would want to do. I said all the right things about it's not the right way to communicate and I would think it over. I ultimately said yes, and then arranged to come to Washington to have a hearing and all of that.

Then something new entered the picture that I again was not aware of. Phil Habib was under doctor's orders to leave the under secretary for political affairs job. Evidently he had recommended that I, instead of going to Athens, come back into that job. I was unaware of any of this until I reached the United States, when I was in Philadelphia on route, and I was asked to hurry up and get down here. They wanted to talk to me, and I did get here. Before I even saw the Secretary of State I was called by Henry Kissinger who was somewhere, I think, in Mexico. He wanted me to know that he had — whether he had been asked to make a recommendation or just made his own recommendation, I am not sure that I recall, if I knew.

In any case Cy Vance raised it with me when I saw him. I said, of course, I'll be interested in that, it's a senior position held by a career person. I was asked did I have any ideas as to how it should be run, and what level of influence it should have. I remember, very well, emphasizing that one of the responsibilities it seemed to me that job had, inherently, was to look after the interest of the career Foreign Service.

Then he said that he wanted to talk to me about Greece. It had happened that he had just been there. Because Athens was, I guess, without an ambassador, for something like six or seven months. The Agr#ment had already been asked for and given, so that was well along and did I have a date for a hearing, and I said, “Yes, I have a date for a hearing.” He said, “Well, I want to think all this over.” I said, “You better let me know, because I can't change the date of the hearing. In fact, I pushed them to get me on this week.” Because at the other end, I had already gotten an appointment to say farewell to the Queen. That couldn't be changed.

As it turned out, he wanted to speak with David Newsom, whom he hadn't met. Out of that, the job, then, was offered to Newsom, and I was asked to go to Greece. I gladly went. I had my hearing, but I didn't even stay to be sworn in. I may be the only ambassador who was sworn in by a vice consul. When I learned that could be done under the regulations, I said I'm going to have to hurry back to The Hague. I had a young FSO-6 swear me in, and that was very fun, and so off I went, happily.

Q: When did you go to Greece?

MCCLOSKEY: I arrived in March of 1978.

Q: What were the principal issues that you faced at that time?

MCCLOSKEY: Trying to have Greece re-integrated into NATO was the most critical one. Because it foolishly withdrew itself, earlier on, out of anger, frustration. That was a principal subject. The status of the bases was always there, which, in turn, meant levels of military assistance from the United States was an issue.

It was during this period that the Greeks got themselves worked into this so-called seven-to-ten formula, which orders that Greece should receive seven dollars of military assistance for every ten dollars that Turkey receives. I tried vainly, and without success,

to persuade the Greeks that this is foolish and could end up being a disservice to you at some point. You don't persuade Greeks very easily on any number of questions.

There were other matters that, I guess I'd would have to say, I put on the agenda. I felt that too much of the U.S.-Greece relationship was identified with the military issues. The status of the bases, and the levels of military assistance. While it wasn't a part of it, there was some connection, in many Greek minds, with the U.S. role in Greece historically, which I thought was the heaviest baggage that we all had to carry, and I think is still the case.

There was a time when nothing happened in Greece that the United States didn't either direct or have a hand in. We had American ambassadors there who behaved like viceroys in the country. We had American officers assigned to various government departments in the Greek government. Most Greeks simply accept that nothing happens there that the United States doesn't have the responsibility for, and surely, nothing that they perceive to be negative to their own interest happens that the U.S. doesn't have something to do with.

Opponents of the Junta are quite convinced that it was the United States that brought the Junta to power. They are quite convinced that it was the United States behind the Junta that overthrew Makarios in favor of the Turks on Cyprus. That begets all kinds of dreads and fears that affect the Greek psyche. We have ourselves to blame for it, for this unfortunate earlier period. Now it must be said that without U.S. help, Greece probably may not have gotten off its knees in the late 1940s after World War II, and as a result of its own civil war. I've always felt that we just didn't understand when it was time to let go of the levers of power, and that we were going to have to be more strict with the Greeks in the responsibility for foreign aid, when you still had foreign economic programs there. You don't have them now. And that the time would come when we were going to have to make a virtue of non-interference. I spent many, many hours arguing, I'm afraid, fruitlessly, with many Greeks about what the United States did not do. I had long meetings with Papandreou, who didn't come into power until after I. ...

Q: This is Andreas Papandreou.

MCCLOSKEY: Andreas, but he was the leader of the Pasok.

Q: Was it the Pan Hellenic Socialist Union?

MCCLOSKEY: Socialist union.

Q: Socialist union, yes.

MCCLOSKEY: When I got to Greece, the American embassy had a policy of having no contact with Papandreou or Pasok, and somehow or another had made virtue of this. I said, “I just don't think this makes a hell of a lot of sense. It's one thing that you disagree with the guy. You may not like him or his party, but it is the principal opposition, and I am going to go and see him.”

So that made a number of people uncomfortable, but I did. He used it to his own advantage. I used to have these conversations with him, particularly after he would had said something egregious about the United States and Cyprus. I said to him, “There is nothing about Cyprus in this recent period that I don't know. I was either there or at the other end during the crisis. There are some things I will admit to you that I don't know about the 1967 period and the Junta taking power here. But I assure you I have tried to read everything available so that I can understand it. But when I tell you something about Cyprus, please take it to be the truth, varnished or unvarnished. I will, at the same time, question everything you say about the Junta period and all of that.”

I went out of my way to see him and to establish contact with him where I would see him from time to time. I encouraged my wife to visit his wife as she did. I thought that whatever the issues, there was no reason not to have some civilized discourse with the man. Well, he later became Prime Minister, and he is still Prime Minister. I had the funny sense that we had some peculiar notions about how to conduct our relations with Greece.

Q: It does.

MCCLOSKEY: You were there before me.

Q: Well, I was there before, and it was very much a dog in the manger. We don't talk to this. Somehow I have the feeling that we became almost Greek in our attitude. We had too many old hands. We had too many Greek Americans. My predecessor had been a Greek American, who, as a consul general, wouldn't deal with the communist problem. They were all damned to hell. Well, we had a law which allowed differentiation. He would not make it. This is a problem.

MCCLOSKEY: It's a serious problem, and I don't know whether I should put this on the record or not — turn it off for the moment.

Q: What do you think was the motivation behind Papandreou? He had studied in the United States. Actually, we saved his life at the time of the '67 coup.

MCCLOSKEY: There is a telegram I have seen that Phil Talbot sent back the day after Papandreou was released from prison. He was imprisoned by the Junta. I'm a little vague on how long, but his wife has written about this, and others have written about it. Various people, I know, raised this high up in the U.S. government as with Lyndon Johnson. A number of imminent Americans intervened. In any case, he was finally released. He saw Talbot, evidently, the day after that. The telegram begins by attributing to Papandreou his, something like, everlasting gratitude.

Yet here is a man who made capital and still does on anti-American issues, more of which are fabricated than real. The current problem he has with embezzlement by a man who came from the United States and took over the bank of Crete and other enterprises. The stories are that the party, if not the Prime Minister, has benefitted from all of this. Papandreou has now denounced as an American CIA plot against him, personally, and his party in a period just before elections, which are to occur again this year. You're getting to

the heart of a very troubling question here, and it is an anti-Americanism in Greece that is profoundly disturbing to me.

Q: It's always been there, I think. It used to be anti-British, and when the British pulled out, we took it. This is, at least, my impression.

MCCLOSKEY: You're not far off, at all. There is still enough of it there, that we ought to be concerned about. Our diplomats should be very scrupulous about how they conduct themselves in Greece. There is a way to serve American interest very easily and appropriately, and to maintain good relations with Greeks and Greek government while you're doing it. That, I think, makes imminent good sense. I don't know how this latent anti-Americanism is going to be overcome, except that we will simply have to demonstrate that we are not manipulating Greece.

Q: Did Papandreou really believe this, or was this purely a way that he kept in power? Did he talk one way to you, and one way to the outside?

MCCLOSKEY: Yes, parenthesis, yes.

Q: Let me ask a question, again, it's one I asked myself when I was there. How important did you find — the bases issue was obviously, a major issue — but talking about dealing with a difficult group with the American military, were you able to get satisfactory answers that these bases, particularly three, the one in Neamakri, which is naval communications, the one at Athens airport, and then the one on Crete, that these were really essential. They are a burr under our saddle, in NATO relations and everything else, particularly with the Greeks.

MCCLOSKEY: You don't get what I would accept as an honest answer. You have to take into account a military mind set that says you've got to have redundancies. If the helicopter doesn't work, then you need to have a back up. It's an ingrained mind-set among military, at least ours, and perhaps all military.I once came back for consultation, and at the urging

and insistence of the desk in the State Department, agreed to go and meet with the Joint Chiefs of Staff. This was in 1980 and we were going to resume the base negotiations in September, and I would carry back our first draft to present to the Greek government. I tried to convince the Joint Chiefs, that day, that it would be in our interest to have a study undertaken to answer this very question. Which of these facilities are vital to us any longer, because they are becoming an awful burden to carry. We have incidents of one kind or another directed against U.S. military there. While I was speaking, the Chief of Naval Operations dozed off. I'll leave my ego aside. I just walked out of the room infuriated, knowing that no such thing would ever be done. The Air Force chief, at the time, began to argue against it right in the room. I knew it was a hopeless case. As for the military that are with you on assignment, they justify their own assignment.

Q: You looked at it hard, and you were not convinced that these were as essential as they said?

MCCLOSKEY: Allowing that I don't understand every bit of technical wizardry that is performed at these places. I went to all of them more than once. I would test my own instincts against others of my country team. I was quite convinced that we certainly didn't need all that we had there, and we were simply asking for more trouble.

Indeed, I was hopeful, at one time, of at least having the main entrance to the base moved off the highway. A couple of things had happened. One I remember, the station had given me information that there were photographs being made of the entrance by what I was told were Libyans, who had made their way into Athens. There were always little dust-ups outside that gate of one kind or another.

Q: This is the one by the main airport?

MCCLOSKEY: Yes, and the entrance is right on the main highway. But from a small thing like that, and I had some discussion of that during the negotiation which we finally got to.

Which, then, the Greek government suspended because we couldn't, well that's another long story. Perhaps, I should say something about it here?

Q: Would you, please?

MCCLOSKEY: The negotiation that I undertook in September of 1980 was a continuation of a negotiation that had not been completed in 1976, in which the United States had agreed to take certain steps by way of making an agreement at that time. The draft text that I took back then to reopen the negotiations in 1980 had written into it efforts to recapture some things that were agreed to be given up in the earlier round, that finished in 1976. I could see that we were heading for trouble right away because the other side, the Greek side, kept reminding me. But these are issues that were already agreed to by your side in the previous negotiation. I knew that, at the center of things, we were not going to be able to satisfy the Greek desire for the kind of military equipment and the amounts of money it wanted under FMS terms.

Q: FMS being?

MCCLOSKEY: Foreign military sales. We were not going to be able to reach up to where they were setting their sites, and that would be the heart of the agreement. We were only going to aggravate the thing by trying to recall concessions we had made, for example, the role of the senior American official at the Herakleion air base. Was the senior official at the base the Greek commander or the American commander? We had said in the earlier negotiation that it should be the Greek commander. Suddenly, things like that we were trying to take back. So I think the negotiation was fated to have serious difficulty from the beginning.

In any case, what they were asking for in terms of military equipment and money was out of reach for the United States. I think, however, we did not give it our best shot. I was continually told that I couldn't offer another formulation. That this couldn't be done. This was a period of great austerity, and we were in base negotiations in various places

around the world. I didn't have to be reminded of things like that, having done a successful negotiation with Spain just a couple of years before this.

Then it got even a bit tawdry toward the end when I was given a telephone call, and told that I could offer the Greek government X number of F-5 aircraft, and X quantity of spare parts. I found myself running out to the minister of defense's house in the middle of the night with my own handwriting of these items on a slip of paper. All of which was too little, too late, and the negotiation was never taken seriously enough in Washington. So when you hear a Greek, as you often will, say that we're taken for granted, I think there was some of that behind this negotiation that forecast it was not going to succeed.

Q: Well, my last post abroad was consul general in Naples, and I used to talk to the commander-in-chief of NATO south, who at that time was Admiral.

MCCLOSKEY: Did you go there after, what's his name?

Q: William Crowe.

MCCLOSKEY: William Crowe. Well, I was over there when he was there.

Q: I talked to Admiral Crowe and asked him, because of my Greek experience, what role do Greeks play in NATO. I got a big shrug, and he said I spend most of my time trying to balance the Turks and the Greeks. Where the Turks seem to be willing to give it a try — they realize they have a potential Soviet enemy. The Greeks seem to use this strictly as a way to get at the Turks. Did you feel that they were really interested in NATO per se, or was this just an instrument? Did they feel there was a Soviet threat?

MCCLOSKEY: Naturally, I would have to say, they really weren't all that interested. Now, if you speak about the military and the government, they were very much interested, provided they could reintegrate into NATO on their terms.

Q: How did that play out while you were there, the reintegration?

MCCLOSKEY: It finally worked. The deed was done. Bernard Rogers succeeded out Haig.

Q: Yes, he was the general in charge of NATO.

MCCLOSKEY: There is a man, I cannot think of, a U.S. Army colonel, who I think was quite instrumental in finding the formula, which is a rather convoluted one, that I am afraid that I can't even repeat from memory here, that assured that Greece would return to the military command.

Q: This type of negotiation ended up more on the military side, rather than the ambassadorial side.

MCCLOSKEY: Yes.

Q: Well, I've kept you a long time, but just a couple of other quick questions. How did you find the embassy staff?

MCCLOSKEY: By and large, first rate, very strong political section, very good economic section. The station under its leadership at that time, quite good, every now and then, I would have to say whoa, not too much. The very large Greek staff was something I had to give a lot of attention and time to. They had many grievances. We did our best with them. There is something in the Greek's psyche, you know: but what will you do for me tomorrow? It wasn't a matter that I felt the ambassador could stay out of, and to meet with them, hear them out, go as far as I felt I could, and tell them that was as much as we could do. You never satisfied them.

Q: How did the Iranian hostage crisis, you were there, that must have had repercussions on you all, because you were pretty close to the situation?

MCCLOSKEY: Yes, some of the first people who came out, came into Athens, Bill Sullivan's wife came and stayed with us. Then, when the big day came, that is to say, on U.S. inauguration day, 1981, they were all flown into Athens. So I was the first one to have any contact with them after they had left Tehran. We let it be known up and down the line that Athens was ready and able to give any aid and comfort to Americans who had made their way out of Iran. From time to time, people came in, stayed with one or another of the embassy staff, either on their way home or prior to going back into Tehran, before the big kidnaping.

Q: How about terrorism? The Greek government, even into the colonels, had a very ambiguous role. They were just almost acquiesced to terrorist acts, as long as it didn't involve Greeks.

MCCLOSKEY: I try to give them some benefit of the doubt here, to the extent that terrorism is fairly, or unfairly, associated with the Arab world, where hijackings began and so on. Before the European gangs got involved about it, Meinhof, and the people in Italy and so on. The Greeks make much of this historic relationship, they call it, with the Arab world. There is something of a certain schizophrenia, I think, in Greeks, where there is one part of them that says they want to be Western, we're European, there is something else there, that says we are, in effect, part of the Orient. We look a lot like some of these people and all of that, but I don't want to overdo it. But I do in terms of benefit of the doubt, they do lean over backwards where Arab issues are concerned and perhaps even more so in the current government.

They, I think, even until today, have not given full diplomatic recognition to Israel. So the man who is there as my counter part is not recognized as the Israeli ambassador. This is galling, but it was even the case in the conservative government of Karamanlis. I thing it has something to do with these earlier antecedents which the Greeks see as more

important to them, that is, their relationships in the Arab world. Terrorism, as such, was not a big issue when I was there. True, what's Welch's first name?

Q: I can't remember, he was the station chief killed in 1974.

MCCLOSKEY: He was killed by terrorists, who have never been apprehended, and whether that says something about the effectiveness of Greek police, or the impossibility of laying hand to whoever was responsible. However, since then, we have had at least two other Americans assassinated, military officers, again no one as far as I know apprehended. The Greeks are simply not the Israelis. They probably don't cope with this as well as some others, but then nobody is coping with it all that well. There is no way to guarantee against an assassination or almost any other kind of a terrorist act, provided the terrorists are prepared to wait, and scheme it all out. You can get away with almost anything.

Q: Before leaving this subject, how did you evaluate Clerides as the Greek leader whom you dealt with at the time?

MCCLOSKEY: Someone who has a deserved reputation for leadership and all that the democratic process carries with it, but I'm afraid whose time was passing. Not when he first came back in '74, because you were there, he was hailed. He was the right man at the right time, but looked at hard, politically, he was stifling his own party, by preventing younger blood from coming up into leadership positions. I say that with some affection for the man, but, I think, that's just the plain fact, and the party has not prospered, I think, in part because of that.

Q: You left when?

MCCLOSKEY: In the summer of 1981.

Q: You retired at that point?

MCCLOSKEY: I retired, yes. I took leave, and then I retired September 30th.

Q: In looking at your career, these are questions we try to ask of everyone we interview, what would you say gave you the greatest satisfaction, any incident or dealings, or just general things.

MCCLOSKEY: I certainly can't pick any specific one time thing. It would be hard to go beyond the experience of having been the press spokesman and working intimately with one, two, three, at least three Secretaries of State. The rewards, many of which are intangible, but no less satisfying, are many. There is the involvement, the pleasure in seeing something done well, the frustration when things go wrong, but being there is enormously satisfying when you know that there are so few people who are at the vortex of big and small events. You contribute in your own small way, even if it's mainly your common sense that people want to hear and ask for. I can't think of anything that really out does or surpasses that, but we are talking about a period of nine to ten years.

Q: I think you mentioned something, that really sometimes gets lost site of, and that is the importance, not necessarily the expert, but of plain common sense when people have become immersed in a problem. That sometimes common sense says get out of it, or don't do this, or maybe we ought to do that, which is not always there.

A final question, and I am sure it's happened to you many times. How do you reply to a young man or woman coming to you and say what about the Foreign Service as a career today?

MCCLOSKEY: My immediate reaction is go for it. I have a daughter who just took the exam, and didn't do well enough in the written to have passed it. So my immediate instinct is to encourage it. I realize that it's a service that has to share the responsibilities, satisfactions with more departments of government than historically it had to do in the

past. That with the broadened agenda that the foreign policy game now has before it means that you could maybe end up in more dull jobs than was the case in the past.

Finally, a word of caution, I guess, look at this possibly as only half a career, and not an entire career. The system is so composed, constructed, and I don't know what the answers are to what are some obvious problems, that it does lead to certain frustrations. People who have given it a lifetime, or a good part of a lifetime, and don't quite get to the point that they feel their performance, their commitment, and their talents justify, are understandably frustrated, and dissatisfied. You want to try to avoid that. Do the best you can, know what to expect, but keep in mind that you may want to do something else. There are many other things that can give you, maybe, equal satisfaction.

Q: Well, Mr. Ambassador, thank you very much.

End of interview